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Author(s): Ruth B. Bottigheimer

Source: *Social History*, Oct., 1989, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Oct., 1989), pp. 343-357

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/4285792

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Ruth B. Bottigheimer

Fairy tales, folk narrative research and history

THE PROBLEM

As social historians have interpreted culture and cultural history increasingly broadly, folk and fairy tales have come to be thought of as useful sources to document the world view and experience of the lowest social classes. The liveliness of the interest in folk and fairy tales as sources is demonstrated by the number of recent studies which take folk narrative as their point of departure to investigate social conflicts, psychological phenomena, the attitudes or even the daily habits of broad segments of society.[1] Folk narrative specialists demonstrate a growing – and corresponding – conviction that folk and fairy tales are historically determined, a belief that content, style and plot grow out of the surrounding culture rather than representing an ageless and unchanging tradition.[2] Yet from the point of view of a folk narrative scholar, many historical studies accept propositions about folk and fairy tales no longer held by mainstream folk narrative scholars, propositions which both date the scholarship and limit the effectiveness of the enquiries. The problem is one familiar to every interdisciplinary study, namely situating one's discussion within at least two methodologies and sets of assumptions, and ensuring that both sets are at least contemporary with one another.

In the order of their publication, the studies which I have particularly noted are Hermann Rebel and Peter Taylor's 'Hessian peasant women, their families and the draft',[3] Eugen Weber's 'Fairies and hard facts: the reality of folk tales',[4] Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Love, Death and Money in the Pays d'Oc*,[5] Dorothy Thelander's 'Mother Goose and her goslings: the France of Louis XIV as seen through the fairy tale',[6] and Robert Darnton's 'Peasants tell tales' in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French History*.[7] In the most recent entry to the lists, Hermann Rebel pleads the case

[1] Rudolf Schenda, 'Tendenzen der aktuellen volkskundlichen Erzählforschung im deutschsprachigen Raum' in Isac Chiva and Utz Jeggle (eds), *Deutsche Volkskunde – Französische Ethnologie* (New York and Frankfurt, 1987), 271–91.

[2] The bibliography for this subject is exceptionally rich and varied. I shall limit citations principally to studies from the 1970s and 1980s, acknowledging that in such an article the bibliography can in no way be regarded as complete.

[3] *Journal of Family History*, VI (1981), 347–78.

[4] *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XLII (1981), 93–113.

[5] New York, 1982.

[6] *The Journal of Modern History*, LIV (1982), 467–96.

[7] New York, 1984.

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for the theoretical possibility of folk provenance of *Grimms' Tales* in the pages of this journal in 'Why not "Old Marie" . . . or someone very much like her?'[8] against Heinz Rölleke's assertions about their bourgeois origins in 'The "utterly Hessian" fairy tales by "Old Marie": the end of a myth'.[9] Rebel, Taylor, Weber, Le Roy Ladurie, Thelander and Darnton argue their points from different disciplines, different perspectives and with differing intentions, but they are united by their acceptance of a common set of assumptions about folk and fairy tales. In nearly every case, their positions would be either understood differently or disputed hotly by most contemporary folk narrative scholars.

In common with generations of nationalistic and nation-forming popular and scholarly sentiment, several of the articles in question posit a close relationship between folk and fairy tales and peasant culture. Rebel and Taylor use *Grimms' Tales* as 'historical sources whose applicability is limited to late eighteenth-century Hesse-Cassel' (349); Weber argues that 'fairy tales can tell us a great deal about real conditions in the world of those who told and those who heard the tales' (96); and Darnton holds that the tales published by Delarue and Tenèze offer 'one of the few points of entry into the mental world of peasants under the Old Regime' (18). The common denominator for these statements is that peasants told tales, which seems undeniable, but not one questions what proportion of peasant 'talk' these tales represent. The folk narrativist Rudolf Schenda, for example, decries the notion that fairy tales formed a significant part of popular culture,[10] and we must all ponder the fact that Perrault's *Contes* do not contain a single witch in a century of witch trials and burnings.

A further complication grows out of the historians' frequently ahistorical treatment of folk and fairy tales. It is as if they believe that these narratives had reached the printed page by an unexceptionable and unedited route. This ahistoricity differs but little from long-held but outmoded beliefs that tales passed unchanged from one century to the next.[11] And then there is the problematic question of Charles Perrault, the Parisian courtier, as a peasant source (Darnton and Thelander),[12] despite internal stylistic and content evidence and external literary historical evidence to the contrary. A recent study by Jeanne Morgan persuasively places his tales within a literary rather than a folk tradition.[13]

A second and pervasive assumption among these studies is the concept of a continuous oral tradition, uncontaminated by and independent of literary influence. The length of this posited tradition varies from well over a thousand years to a few centuries: Rebel and Taylor suggest that ravens as the messengers of war and death link the nineteenth-century tales investigated to Germanic mythology (360), and Darnton is comfortable with the surely erroneous belief that tales collected in Nièvre in 1885 accurately

[8] *Social History*, XI, 1 (1988), 1–24.

[9] Available in English translation in Ruth B. Bottigheimer (ed.), *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm* (Philadelphia, 1986), 287–300.

[10] 'Fairy tales through the lens of sociological literary criticism', MLA address, 1987.

[11] John Ellis's polemic, *One Fairy Story Too Many: The Brothers Grimm and Their Tales* (Chicago and London, 1983).

[12] Jack Zipes has also said that Perrault took 'his material from the oral tradition of the common people . . . probably . . . his son's nurse' in *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (South Hadley, 1983), 11.

[13] Jeanne Morgan, *'Perrault's Morals for Moderns* (New York and Frankfurt, 1985).

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reproduced tales told in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (16). In the latter case, the arithmetic of the evidence suggests the presence of a uniform (i.e. published) and immediate literary model: of thirty-five versions of 'Little Red Riding Hood' recorded in Delarue–Tenèze, twenty 'correspond exactly to the primitive "Conte de la mère grand" except for a few details' (17).[14] Even Walter Anderson was unable to reproduce such perfect unalterability in his oral narrative experiments.[15] Rebel also ignores the publishing history of the many fairy tale collections which preceded and nourished the Grimms' collection.[16] Add to this the known editorial history of each of the tales[17] and Wilhelm Grimm's bourgeois filtering of folk variants as they flowed in during the course of his life[18] as well as the late nineteenth-century tendency among bourgeois scholars to reformulate the folk in a more acceptable image than the one in which they encountered it,[19] and one must conclude that each of these historians would have treated his sources with far more caution had he been aware of contemporary and/or subsequent literary and folk narrative studies which are sceptical of the fairy tale = folk equation.

Another assumption common to each of the articles is that the *veillée* served peasants as a folk- and fairy tale-telling venue. The question is not whether *veillées* existed, but what went on there. There seems little doubt that they were rife with physical and verbal ribaldry,[20] but there is room for much doubt about fairy tales having played much part in the general merriment.[21] In any case, the existence of a *veillée* can scarcely be taken as an assurance that fairy tales as we know them would necessarily have been told there.

Specific collections have served as springboards for speculations about national character. Darnton, for example, characterizes the French tales in Delarue–Tenèze as 'Cartesian' and 'dramatic'; the English ones as 'more genial' and 'whimsical'; the Italian ones of Basile, Pitfe and Calvino as 'burlesques' full of 'humour'; and the German ones as 'macabre' and full of 'horror' (35–46). Identifiable characteristics clearly emerge from national tale collections, but deciding which collections are 'national' is quite another matter. It is certainly true that the Grimms strove to create a tale collection which would represent all German speakers, including those of Alsace, Switzerland, Austria, Bohemia and what was then southern Denmark, but the fact is that *Grimms' Tales* is

[14] For other readings of 'Red Riding Hood' see Steven Swann Jones, 'On analysing fairy tales: "Little Red Riding Hood" revisited', *Western Folklore*, XLVI (1987), 97–106; Elliott Oring, 'On the meaning of Mother Goose', *Western Folklore*, XLVI (1987), 106–11.

[15] *Ein volkskundliches Experiment* (Helsinki, 1951 = FFC 141).

[16] Bottigheimer, *'Grimms' Tales* and the three-thousand-year tradition' and 'Fairy tales, society, and scholarship' in *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys* (New Haven and London, 1987).

[17] Heinz Rölleke (ed.), *Brüder Grimm: Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 3 vols (Stuttgart, 1980), III, 441–543.

[18] Bottigheimer, 'From gold to guilt: the forces which re-shaped *Grimms' Tales*' in James M. McGlathery (ed.), *The Brothers Grimm and Folktale* (Urbana, 1988), 192–204.

[19] Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren, *Culture Builders: A Historical Anthropology of Middle-Class Life* (New Brunswick, 1987), esp. 'How nature became natural', 57–61.

[20] Hans Medick, 'Village spinning bees: sexual culture and free time among rural youth in early modern Germany' in *Interest and Emotion: Essays on the Study of Family and Kinship* (Cambridge, 1984), 317–39. Medick analyses spinning bees in Catholic Bavaria; to my knowledge a similar study has not addressed Protestant spinning bees.

[21] For France, see Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (Princeton, 1987), 55–7; for Germany see Rudolf Schenda, 'Fairy tales through the lens of sociological literary criticism', *op. cit.*

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predominantly a central and north German Protestant collection edited according to a hidden agenda of nineteenth-century history-affirming and nation-creating national fervour. Furthermore, it is only one of many collections of German folk and fairy tales, many of which are far less edited than the Grimm collection, a fact which very much vitiates equating 'Grimm' with 'German', at least in the early nineteenth century, when there were many Germanies – socially, geographically and religiously.

It is very easy to mistake fairy tale conventions for historical evidence, as Weber does when he suggests that tales about the inappropriate use of language reflect the diversity of French dialects (99) or when Darnton accepts the ogres' seven children in Perrault's 'Le Petit Poucet' as evidence of large families. The first is a set piece in the fairy tales of all European nationalities, and the second reflects fairy tale numerology in which there are either two children (one good and one bad), or three or seven children (because these are fairy tale numerals).

A variation on this theme is the fairy tale cast of characters, in particular the stepmother-as-evil-figure. For Weber and Darnton the presence of evil stepmothers (in tales which it must be reiterated were collected in the nineteenth century) substantiates remarriage rates of widowers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but neither Weber's nor Darnton's discussion links remarriage to the presence of children brought into the marriage by a widow (10 per cent of whom remarried, according to Darnton) in which case step*fathers* would also have been created by the remarriage. The stepfather-as-wicked-figure is, however, notably absent in the tales discussed. In like manner Weber's cannibal-as-evil-figure derives for him from the fact that carnivores lived in cities or chateaux and 'that may be why we have a lot of legends about highborn ladies eating little children' (100–1) – as though only women, but not men, lived in cities and chateaux. Neither Darnton nor Weber could advert to scholarship which had not yet appeared on the way in which the female figures of earlier tales re-emerged under nineteenth-century editing as witches, cannibals, or worse, but the particular skewing of gender which transforms wicked mothers-in-law into cannibalistic witches appears to be a peculiarly nineteenth-century legacy,[22] rather than evidence of seventeenth- or eighteenth-century thought.

Gendering evil into stepmothers and female cannibals leads directly into a discussion of the gender of scholarship. Weber is content with his explanation of female cannibals, even though it ignores existing textual evidence for cannibalistic male ogres in both the French and English traditions, as well as the clear presence of men in chateaux and cities. But rather more surprising is the fact that both Weber and Darnton read past the father who initiates abandonment in Perrault's 'Le Petit Poucet', while the mother berates her husband for his hardheartedness. Only Dorothy Thelander notices paternal brutality (478).

Methodologically nearly all these studies suffer from numerous internal contradictions implicit in the nature of the undertaking. Weber's and Darnton's method uses real world evidence to substantiate the life situation described in a folk or fairy tale. In this manner they undermine their own argument that fairy tales can tell us about conditions in the past when, in fact, they simply offer a parallel source. In Rebel's reasoning, the Cassel

[22] Bottigheimer, *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys*, 101 n. 2.

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girls and young women who served as the Grimms' informants are at one moment being 'imprinted' by 'the serving women and nannies who cared for them and who taught them in the ways the [oral] tradition was meant to be carried on' (15) and in the next moment they are invalidated as sources because they were bourgeois. Meant? By whom? And in any case, this is a statement which ignores an entire body of scholarship about the education of girls in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In another area, Darnton's stress on the importance of structure is vitiated by subsequent acknowledgement that a fairy tale's style determines its meaning (45).

It is only the studies of folk and fairy tales by Thelander and Le Roy Ladurie that add to what is already known rather than simply corroborating existing evidence from other sources. Thelander concludes that the fairy tales of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century *précieux* reflect the documentable concerns of a real group of people, their female authors, and that the way in which they tell their tales reveals deep ambivalence about the French monarchy. For his part, Le Roy Ladurie uses 'Jean l'Ont Pris', an eighteenth-century adaptation of a Languedoc folk tale, to demonstrate the survival of literary structures which correspond to social practices, a structure which he calls the Occitan love-square.

All of these studies try to proceed from folk and fairy tale to historical fact; the opposite path has also been taken, as in Natalie Z. Davis's study of letters of remission.[23] She concludes that sixteenth-century letters of remission were composed according to the plots of Renaissance novellas (a form which overlaps with folk narrative), and suggests that real voices, both men's and women's, can be heard in the letters themselves.

Given the limited resources for locating folk voice in the past and the problematic nature of the exercise, as indicated in the foregoing discussion, I would like to sum up current thinking by folk narrativists in areas which seem germane to historians' interests. In so doing, I hope to accelerate the dissemination of the results of current scholarship, which have profoundly and persuasively altered the way folk and fairy tales are regarded by folk narrative scholars. Terms like 'oral' and 'folk' mean something vastly different today from what they connoted only a generation ago. Real and perceived orality, the relationship between publishing history and 'oral' or 'folk' narrative, textual integrity, and the utility and validity of Marxist, feminist and psychoanalytical discussions of folk narrative[24] are lively, and unresolved, issues among folk narrativists.

Hermann Rebel's explicit insistence on 'folk intelligence' (which corresponds to aspects of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century folklore of the folk) and Jack Zipes's excoriation of the bourgeoisie's instrumentalization of fairy tales express Marxist interest in the origins and uses of folk and fairy tales. Rebel wants to reappropriate published fairy tales for the folk, while Zipes means to free children from their bourgeois parents'

[23] *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* (Stanford, 1987).

[24] Excellent bibliographies exist for each of these areas. Jack Zipes, 'Folklore research and western marxism', *Journal of American Folklore*, XCVII (1984), 329–37; Cynthia Helms, 'Story-telling, gender and language in folk/fairy tales: a selected annotated bibliography', *Women and Language*, X, 2 (1987), 3–11 (will appear in updated form in Fall 1989 *National Storytelling Journal*); Bengt Holbek, 'Psychological interpretations of folktales and myths: a bibliography', *Merveilles et Contes*, 1, 2 (1987), 144–60.

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efforts to civilize them in class-based categories and patterns. There is little such noticeably explicit Marxism among western folk narrativists. On the other hand, contemporary scholarship emphasizes the biography of the storyteller and looks for as much information as possible about his or her social situation in order to illuminate the way in which s/he tells a tale. The folklorist Bengt Holbek, as well as the classicist Eric Havelock, describe folk and fairy tale storytellers as socially marginal, classifying them in a way which unites socially and economically disparate but functionally similar individuals. That is, time on their hands characterizes the landless labourer as well as the leisured lady, the Haxthausen peasants and the Hassenpflug sisters.[25] One of the reasons why Marxism is less pronounced in folk narrative studies may be that contemporary folk narrativists by and large address a different and less edited body of material (for example, the stories of an Evald Tang Kristensen), whereas scholars outside the field turn to published collections, which are more accessible, but which have been shaped and reformulated by their usually educated and middle-class editors to a great extent.

Feminist studies of folk and fairy tales have gone through three generations to date. In discussing fairy tale plots and pictures, Kaye Stone pointed out that Snow White spent far too much time doing housework, and that Disney sweetened her disposition artificially to a poisonously saccharine level.[26] The next body of feminist scholarship, which originated within feminism rather than within folk narrative studies, asserted that fairy tales preserved evidence of ancient matriarchal societies. Like parallel assertions that fairy tales preserve stone age cultic practices, folk narrativists do not generally take such propositions seriously. Linking literary and folk narrative studies, the third body of feminist scholarship investigates plot and language in the light of the tales' narrators and editors. Satu Apo, for example, finds that tales told by women have significantly more active heroines than those told by men, and my work suggests that fairy tales can simultaneously incorporate several – sometimes directly contradictory – messages, one at the plot level, others at the level of structure and language.[27] Like Stone's work, these are part and parcel of folk narrative interest in conscious or unconscious narrative crafting by the narrator which results in the expression of a distinctive, characteristic and identifiable world view.

ORALITY

In 1963 five studies which took orality as a central or related theme appeared within months of each other.[28] In the intervening twenty-five years 'oral' and 'orality' have taken

[25] Eric Havelock discusses marginality and oral narration in *The Muse Learns to Write* (1986), reviewed in *Fabula*, XXVIII, 3/4 (1987), 344–6; and Bengt Holbek, *Interpretation of Fairy Tales: Danish Folklore in a European Perspective* (Folklore Fellows Communications, 239, 1987), 147–9.

[26] 'Things Walt Disney never told us' in Claire Farrer (ed.), *Women and Folklore* (Austin, 1975).

[27] Apo, 'The structural analysis of Marina Takalo's fairy tales using Propp's model' in Lauri Honko and Vilmos Voigt (eds), *Genre, Structure and Reproduction in Oral Literature* (Budapest, 1980) and Bottigheimer, chaps 5,6,7,8,11 and Appendix B in *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys*, *op. cit.*

[28] Lévi-Strauss's *Pensée Sauvage*, Jack Goody and Ian Watt's 'Consequences of literacy', Marshall McLuhan's *Gutenberg Galaxy*, Ernst Mayr's *Animal Species and Evolution* and Eric A. Havelock's *Preface to Plato*.

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on different meanings with reference to folk and fairy tales. The lingering positivist belief in an unbroken oral tradition, a survival of a nineteenth-century nationalistic need to underpin and fabricate a convincing folk identity, has died out among folklorists and folk narrativists, but unfortunately it survives outside the discipline. A notable consequence is the widespread assumption among historians, literary critics and psychologists that published folk and fairy tales represent faithful renderings of orally produced narratives and can thus be regarded as reliable sources for the beliefs and attitudes of the illiterate or the marginally literate, or even for populations long dead. The inconvenient fact is that the nineteenth-century folk tales used by historians are chiefly those in published folk tale collections (rather than those in archives, which are less edited), which immediately introduces publishing history with concomitant non-'folk' elements: the urban publisher assessing the taste of his public, the printer responding to sales with additional print runs and the reading public which constituted most of the nineteenth-century buying public. These elements alter but do not entirely deny the utility of folk and fairy tales for scholars attempting to document the mentality of illiterate and semi-literate peoples of past centuries.[29]

It is more a desire for orality than the existence of a demonstrable orality that has led scholars in many disciplines to posit oral sources in the absence of better evidence – and sometimes in the presence of better evidence. For example, in asserting that Perrault's *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (1697) rested on an oral foundation, Marc Soriano ignored Charles Deulin's early (1879) documentation of precursor tales for 'Peau d'Ane', 'La Belle au bois dormant', 'Le Chat botté', 'Les Fées', 'Le Petit Poucet', and 'Cendrillon' in Straparola's *Tredici Piacevoli Notti* and Basile's *Pentamerone*, and used instead the geographical distribution of tales collected in the nineteenth century.[30] Of Perrault's tales, only three have no definitely known or precisely identifiable published antecedents: 'La Barbe bleue', 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' and 'Riquet à la houppe', and in the case of 'Riquet' there exists a good possibility that Perrault's tale is a moralized response to and reformulation of Catherine Bernard's Riquet tale published only months before.[31]

DEFINING THE MATERIAL

Of what does a folk or fairy tale consist? The answers to this simplest of all questions about folk and fairy tales are both legion and diffuse, but they become more precise when one considers the varieties of information provided by the tale itself and the extent to which they depend on the manner in which it has been recorded:

1. A published 'book tale', like one of the Grimms' tales, consists of its plot and the language in which the tale is told.

[29] Elaine J. Lawless offers a good overview of the current definition of 'oral' and 'orality' in 'Oral "character" and "literary" art: a call for a new reciprocity between oral literature and folklore' in *Western Folklore*, XLIV (1985), 77–96. See also Bruno Gentili and Giuseppe Paioni (eds), *Oralita: Cultura, Letteratura, Discorso* (Rome, 1985), the proceedings of a 1980 congress on orality.

[30] *Les Contes de Perrault. Culture Savante et traditions populaires* (Paris, 1968).

[31] Jeanne Morgan, *op. cit.*, 104. See also Umberto Grizzuti, *La Pentamerone et les Contes de Perrault* (Naples, 1934).

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2. A tape-recorded tale, which is purely aural, offers, in addition to plot and language, metalinguistic features which print can indicate but not reproduce: pauses, stress, characterization by voice change (soprano, bass, tenor), and affective colorations (sneer, laughter, condescension, fawning, reverence).
3. A live performance of a tale-telling event, or its simulacrum on film or video, exists in two registers, aural and visual.[32] One sees the narrator grimace, make eye contact, throw her hands up in horror or shrug his shoulders. Non-verbal communication can form part of the tale's text just as essentially as do its plot and language, but they are absent from the published tale. Equally absent are the responses of the real or implied audience, which help steer the narrative,[33] for storytellers adjust their tales according to their perception of the audience – young or old, female or male, canny or innocent. If their listeners already know the story, then narrators can and do play on the fact of the audience's familiarity with it, ironizing the narrative with unexpected language, motif variants and plot deviations. In this way every telling becomes unique, a uniqueness that was erased in, for example, the Grimms' editorial method of collating variant tellings to arrive at a version that would be as close as possible to the postulated 'original'.

FAIRY TALE CONTENT

For many decades plot analysis was dominated by the historico-geographic method of the Finnish school. A hundred years of painstaking research provided invaluable reference tools for detailing the extent of a tale's distribution and the nature of its variants. It also produced the two most widely used reference tools, the Aarne–Thompson Tale-Type Index[34] and the Motif Index of narrative elements in folk tales, ballads, myths, fables, medieval romances, exempla, *fabliaux*, jest-books and local legends,[35] supplemented by Bolte and Polívka's five-volume reference work for *Grimms' Tales*.[36] These reference works, however, have to be used with some caution, since the tale-type and motif indexes incorporate the gender biases of previous generations. In addition, the definition and the traditional concept of motif have been challenged;[37] it

[32] Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative* (Cambridge, 1986).

[33] The classic study of narrative milieu is Linda Dégh, *Folktale and Society: Storytelling in a Hungarian Peasant Community* (Bloomington, 1969).

[34] *The Types of the Folktale* (1961; reprinted Helsinki, 1981).

[35] Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols (Bloomington, 1955–8).

[36] *Anmerkungen zu den 'Kinder- und Hausmärchen'* (1913–32; Hildesheim, 1963) with its extensive historico-geographic documentation of variants for tales which appear in the Grimm collection.

[37] Most recently by Torborg Lundell, 'Gender-related biases in the type and motif indexes of Aarne and Thompson', *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion, and Paradigm*, 149–63; also *Le Bulletin du Groupe de Recherches sémio-linguistiques*, VI (1980), which contains several relevant articles: Joseph Courtés, 'Le motif selon S. Thompson' (3–14) and 'Le motif, unité narrative et/ou culturelle?' (44–54); Claude Bremond, 'Comment conçevoir un index des motifs' (15–29); Denis Bertrand and Jean-Jacques Vincensini, 'La vengeance est un plat qui se mange cuit' (30–43). Dan Ben-Amos, 'The concept of motif in folklore' (17–36) in Venetia Newall (ed.), *Folklore Studies in the Twentieth Century: Proceedings of the Centenary Conference of the Folklore Society. Le conte pourquoi? comment?* (Paris, 1984) has

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has been argued that motifs alone provide little information which could be useful to the social historian, but that analysing motivations within the tale in which a given motif is embedded offers a better route for uncovering underlying attitudes.[38]

Certain elements of folk and fairy tales are stable conventions of the genre and cannot therefore be treated like other pieces of information. If such conventions are taken in isolation, they can be extremely misleading with reference to the storyteller's world view and social attitudes. An example of mistaking a convention for an attitude held by the storyteller and his or her audience emerges from the study of narrative magic. It has been suggested more than once that narrative magic manifests and reveals folk optimism,[39] yet narrative magic is quite simply an integral component of nearly all fairy tale plots with a happy ending.[40] To achieve a happy ending, the magic of the genre requires a perfect fit between what the heroes/heroines require and what they are given: when Cinderella (Grimm No. 21) has to separate lentils from ashes, birds fly in at the window; when the hero of 'The Three Snake Leaves' (Grimm No. 17) needs to retrieve ten sacks of millet seed from the grass, the ant king deploys his thousands of ant subjects to perform the task. Like the numbers three, seven and twelve, the perfect fit between help needed and help offered characterizes the genre as a whole, and defines it as a convention empty of meaning for the social historian.

LANGUAGE IN FOLK AND FAIRY TALES

There is evidence that the vocabulary of a fairy tale provides indicators about the author/narrator's mental world which plot alone can and does not. It can, for instance, be argued that word choice and the distribution of stylistic features like direct and indirect speech represent unconscious deployments of language in the service of otherwise unarticulated values.[41] The degree to which the scholar may exploit this aspect of a folk or fairy tale text is determined by the degree to which the text has been edited and by the storyteller's skill in deploying language. There are probably very few narrators whom

several related articles. Eleazar Meletinsky, 'L'organisation sémantique du récit mythologique et le problème de l'index sémiotique des motifs et des sujets' (21–33); Claude Bremond, 'Traitement des motifs dans un index des ruses' (35–53); Alan Dundes, 'The symbolic equivalence of allomotifs: towards a method of analysing folktales' (187–99); Geneviève Calame-Griaule *et al.*, 'De la variabilité du sens et du sens de la variabilité' (201–29). This listing represents a sampling from a continuing discussion of the nature of motifs.

[38] Bottigheimer, 'Motif, meaning, and editorial change in *Grimms' Tales*: one plot, three tales, and three different stories' in *From One Tale to Another . . . Variability in Narrative* (Paris, 1989), 279–91.

[39] Most recently by Jack Zipes in *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (London, 1988), 26.

[40] The happy ending is the 'lack liquidated' of structuralist parlance. See Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd edn (Austin and London, 1968), especially chap. III, 'The functions of dramatis personae' where the 'lack' of Function IX is 'liquidated' in Function XIX, when 'the narrative reaches its peak' (53–5). It is unfortunately characteristic of disciplinary lag that scholars in other disciplines are adopting structural analysis of folk and fairy tales at a time when many folk narrativists are abandoning this methodology because of its limited utility.

[41] Bottigheimer, *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys*, which investigates the language of *Grimms' Tales* in order to define consistent patterns and coherent values with reference to work, religion, licit speech, eroticism and gender roles.

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one could accurately describe as completely naïve with little conscious awareness of the effect the words they use have on the tales they tell. But among narrators there are degrees of awareness and levels of skill. A fairy tale like 'Beauty and the Beast' exists in numerous variant forms which were composed by the likes of Apuleius, Basile, Perrault, Mme. Leprince de Beaumont and the Grimms. An analysis of its language plunges one into a world of sophisticated wordsmiths whose art is everywhere evident. These carefully crafted texts are far less penetrable to the historian's probe, since their authors play unendingly with language itself as well as with the idea of what constitutes a fiction by setting their tales in a series of frames within frames.

Variety and variability have replaced the search for the shape of the original tale which was the principal goal of the historico-geographic school and which today beguiles relatively few researchers.[42] A skilled storyteller's variations on a single tale parallel the *Goldberg Variations*: just as there is no 'right' form in which its musical theme may appear, there is also no single 'correct' version of a fairy tale. There is no 'French' or 'German' version. Tales collected from peasants smell of the barnyard, whether they be French or German peasants; tales written down in the salon exude other fragrances. These statements reflect the contemporary shift in interest from origins to performance and text.

TEXTUAL INTEGRITY

Unedited material is rarely available from past centuries. Every folk or fairy tale text, whether oral or written, taped or published, has passed through one or more editorial filters. In the nineteenth century, for example, these filters resulted in expurgation and euphemization. Even when one reads – in turn-of-the-century limited circulation publications – sexually or scatologically explicit tales considered unfit for general consumption, one sees a text which has often been scrubbed to a certain extent.[43] In an apparent, but not a real, paradox, the nature and the effect of editorial filters elucidate societal norms as well as obscuring them. The trick is in determining which society one has under the glass and whose editorial filters played a part in the final formulation of a text. These questions likewise represent a shift in focus from the storyteller to those to whom a tale is told. In terms of published texts, content and style allow inferences about what a publisher or editor believed would be marketable to a particular audience. It is a reasonable assumption that in every age editing decisions are closely related to marketing decisions, which in turn allows inferences about the taste of the buying public.[44] It is not that fairy and folk tales from the past cannot be used as a source for cultural history, but that they incorporate the editing and narrative decisions of far more individuals than would appear at first glance.

[42] Variability provided the theme of the 1987 *Secondes Journées d'étude en littérature orale*, 'Problème de la variabilité dans la littérature orale. Genres narratifs. Afrique-Europe.'

[43] *Anthropophyteia, Kryptadia* or, for example, *Russian Secret Tales: Bawdy Tales of Old Russia* by Aleksandr N. Afanasyev, folklore annotations by Giuseppe Pitré, intro. G. Legman (New York, 1965).

[44] Roger Chartier discusses the editing practices of the Bibliothèque bleue in *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton, 1987), 249–51.

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NARRATORS AND NARRATION

The notion of anonymity, that is, of an unknown and unknowable storyteller through whom the entire folk spoke, dominated and defined fairy tale research, especially in the nation- and tradition-forming days of the nineteenth century. In recent years, however, 'anonymity' has said more about the fact that such information was unrecorded than that one may reliably assert the collective authorship of folk and fairy tales.[45] In a productive about-face, twentieth-century folklorists turned their attention to known storytellers. The first, and classic, study was Mark Azadovski's *Eine sibirische Märchenerzählerin*.[46] Contemporary scholars have intensified their study of tale repertoires, detailing the relationship between life history and tale content.[47]

LITERACY AND FOLK NARRATIVE

The illiterate storyteller so beloved of Wilhelm Grimm and Sir Walter Scott has been replaced in contemporary folk narrative scholars' minds by the literate or the semi-literate who have little direct financial participation in or power over their environment. The narrators of fairy tales are in this respect leisured, unlike those who must follow grain prices or plan work schedules.[48] Indeed, one investigation of the orality/literacy intersection implies that oral narrators in a literate society are well aware of their social marginality.[49] The state of mind posited by this thesis suggests that narrators' awareness of their own social marginality might exert a profound effect, first on their formulation of tale content, and second on the way in which researchers might understand tale content.

Literacy has come to a few eastern European countries sufficiently recently that studies of the interplay between published and oral material have been carried out incorporating twentieth-century concerns. As scholars observe storytellers simultaneously drawing on oral tradition and newly published material, the influence of oral and written sources on one another can be – and has been – studied.[50] These studies represent the contemporary application of theories positing a two-tier tradition, first adumbrated by Hans Naumann in the 1920s, which holds that folk narrative has its origins in the upper levels of society and trickles down to the folk.[51] Albert Wesselski incorporated a similar principle into his work,[52] but it contradicted the orthodoxy of its day and was largely overlooked until more recent years. Detailed publishing histories have tended to support

[45] Linda Dégh, 'Erzähler, Erzählen' in the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, IV, cols 315–42; Rainer Wehse, 'Past and present folkloristic narrator research' in *Fairy Tales and Society*, *op. cit.*, 245–58.

[46] Folklore Fellows Communications, 68 (1926); trans. James R. Dow, Monograph Series no. 2 (Austin, 1974).

[47] Juha Pentikäinen, *Oral Repertoire and World View*, Folklore Fellows Communications, 219 (1978); see also Ulrich Tolksdorf, *Eine ostpreussische Märchenerzählerin* (Marburg, 1980).

[48] Holbek, *op. cit.*, 147–9.

[49] Havelock, *op. cit.*

[50] Klaus Roth and Juliana Roth, 'Märchen zwischen mündlicher Tradition und Trivialliteratur: "Die Wette auf die Treue der Ehefrau" (AaTh 882) als volkstümliches Lesestoff in Bulgarien', *Bulgarische Sammlung*, VI (1986), 283–98; also Roth and Roth, 'Die mündliche Tradition und die Entwicklung der bulgarischen Popularliteratur', *Slawische Sprachen und Literaturen*, VII (1986), 305–17.

[51] *Grundzüge der deutschen Volkskunde* (Leipzig, 1926).

[52] *Märchen des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1925) and *Deutsche Märchen vor Grimm* (Vienna, 1938).

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both Naumann's and Wesselski's basic premise, at least as far as plots are concerned. In purely theoretical terms the discussion of oral *v.* written sources is severely hampered by the nature of surviving evidence. For past centuries, quite naturally, it is published material which survives, while the oral component can only be inferred from what is stated within the published material. Here again, conceits and conventions interfere with straightforward conclusions, for much that is said in a literary or literaricized document about 'oral' sources is itself a literary convention (Boccaccio's 'Don't condemn me for the content; I only wrote down what I overheard', for example). Despite these caveats, folk and fairy tales can be made to yield information of social and historical significance. Style differentiates one telling from another, and at certain points style *becomes* content as, for instance, when men speak freely but when women are limited to reported or indirect speech.[53]

NOMENCLATURE

Nomenclature remains a problem. '*Märchen*' assumes brevity. '*Volksmärchen*/folk tale' asserts origin, '*Zaubermärchen*/magic tale/wonder tale' its content. 'Oral narrative' rests on a complicated and often erroneous conception of orality; 'oral literature' reflects ethnographic studies; 'folk narrative' suggests a folk component whose extent is often difficult to ascertain for the text in hand. 'Folk narrative' differs from 'popular literature'.[54] Where does one draw the line – geographically, educationally and socially – in delimiting the 'folk'? Urban or rural? Literate or semi-literate or illiterate?[55] Where one *is* socially (e.g. priest) or where one has come from (e.g. peasant's household)?[56] How broadly does one define the 'folk'? Should it include the schoolteacher and, if it does, then why not the doctor and his wife, the shopkeeper and her husband? And finally, in what time-frame is the folk or fairy tale supposed to exist? Each folk or fairy tale is told by a particular teller and listened to or read by a particular audience in a particular place and at a particular time. One simply may not refer to a timeless 'Red Riding Hood'.

SUB-GENRES

Separate and identifiable sub-genres which exist within the large general genre, folk and fairy tales, are centrally important, because the social views which emerge from fairy tales are frequently determined by the requirements of the genre within which they are formulated. The *Schwank*, i.e. the jest or burlesque, details a rough and tumble, often violent and misogynistic world.[57] The literary fairy tale, on the other hand, offers

[53] Chaps 4, 5, 6, 7, and 15 in *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys*.

[54] Rudolf Schenda, *Volk ohne Buch: Studien zur Sozialgeschichte der populären Lesestoffe 1779–1910* (Frankfurt, 1970), 32–6, and Schenda, *Die Lesestoffe der kleinen Leute: Studien zur populären Literatur im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1976).

[55] Rudolf Schenda, 'Vorlesen: Zwischen Analphabetentum und Bücherwissen. Soziale und kulturelle Aspekte einer semiliterarischen Kommunikationsform', *Bertelsmann Briefe*, CXIX (1986), 5–14.

[56] See Holbek's distinctions, *op. cit.*, 148.

[57] See Elfriede Moser-Rath, *'Lustige Gesellschaft': Schwank und Witz des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts in kultur- und sozialgeschichtlichem Kontext* (Stuttgart, 1984).

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elaborate narratives whose content frequently shows a society with refined sensibilities.[58] Tales told in sermons were crafted to catch and hold the congregation's attention: Athenasius von Dillingen might tell the story of 'Griselda' from the pulpit, but the way he told it reflected his seventeenth-century German parishioners' attitudes rather than those of the fourteenth-century Italian Petrarch whom he cited.[59]

GRIMMS' TALES

Because *Grimms' Tales* figure so prominently in studies of folk and fairy tales, it is worth noting salient features of the text which impinge on historians' use of them as a source for cultural history. With its seven Large Editions and ten Small Editions, in which successive alterations were incorporated into content and style, the collection offers an excellent summation of nineteenth-century attitudes about the folk, but it cannot therefore be construed as a compendium of folk expressions about itself, for the canonical version of *Grimms' Tales*, based on the Final Edition of 1857, is the end product in a long process of careful editing. Consider, for example, the problems generated by ignorance of the editorial history of *Grimms' Tales* in a recent dissertation on the fairy tale as a repository for legal lore.[60] Its author, using the Final Edition of 1857, found much evidence that the folk had embedded the memory of ancient legal practices in the tales, but did not consider the possibility that Jacob Grimm, rather than the folk, may have been the effective source of the legal lore. The reasons for this surmise are simple: versions of tales published early in the fifty-year editorial history of *Grimms' Tales*, that is, those tales which are closest to their putatively oral source, frequently lack the legal lore cited by the author. Taken together with the fact that Jacob had published articles on Germanic law at a very early point in the editorial history of the tales (1815, 1817, 1825),[61] and that he continued to collect evidence of ancient German law and legal custom for years,[62] and that Jacob claimed to have done as much as Wilhelm had done in collecting and editing the collection, makes this a possibility that must be taken seriously

[58] Volker Klotz, *Das europäische Kunstmärchen: Fünfundzwanzig Kapitel seiner Geschichte von der Renaissance bis zur Moderne* (Stuttgart, 1985) and Manfred Grätz, *Das Märchen in der deutschen Aufklärung. Vom Feenmärchen zum Volksmärchen* (Stuttgart, 1988).

[59] For tales included in Catholic sermons, see Elfriede Moser-Rath, *Predigtmärlein der Barockzeit: Exempel, Sage, Schwank und Fabel in geistlichen Quellen des oberdeutschen Raumes* (Berlin, 1964); also W. Welzig (ed.), *Katalog gedruckter deutschsprachiger katholischer Predigtsammlungen* (Vienna, 1984–7) reviewed by C. Daxelmüller in *Fabula*, XXVII (1986), 148–51. For further bibliography see Elfriede Moser-Rath, 'Lesestoff fürs Kirchenvolk: Lektüreanweisungen in katholischen Predigten der Barockzeit', *Fabula*, XXIX (1988), 48–72. Protestant sermon tales are discussed in Wolfgang Brückner (ed.), *Volkserzählung und Reformation: Ein Handbuch zur Tradierung und Funktion von Erzählstoffen und Erzählliteratur im Protestantismus* (Berlin, 1974) and in E. H. Rehermann, *Das Predigtexempel bei protestantischen Theologen des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 1977).

[60] Jens Christian Jessen, 'Das Recht in den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm' (diss., Kiel, 1979). For further bibliographical references see the notes in Gerhard O. W. Mueller, 'The criminological significance of the Grimms' fairy tales' (217–27) in *Fairy Tales and Society*, *op. cit.*

[61] See bibliography in Ludwig Denecke, *Jacob Grimm und sein Bruder Wilhelm* (Stuttgart, 1971), 109–10. A revised and expanded edition of this reference book will soon be published.

[62] Subsequently published as *Deutsche Rechtsaltertümer* (1828, 2nd edn, 1854) and *Weisthümer* (1840–63).

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and carefully investigated before concluding that folk and fairy tales preserved ancient legal lore unchanged through centuries. In this case an academic jurist carried out his study in a disciplinary vacuum.

LESS FREQUENTLY USED SOURCES FOR FOLK AND FAIRY TALES

Perception of reality, interpersonal relationships and world view among the poor are more easily recoverable from less edited sources, such as the Schleswig-Holstein tales collected in the early twentieth century by Kurt Ranke.[63] Archival holdings offer more 'genuine' materials.[64] Largely free of editing requirements born of publishing and marketing decisions, the transformations to which these materials have been subjected are fewer in number:

1. Those inherent in the storytelling situation, i.e. the fact that a prim researcher is told far fewer bawdy details than his earthy colleague.
2. Those inevitable changes that occur when stories are written down in whatever shorthand is used.
3. The conscious or unconscious improvements and completions added by the folk tale collector.

Scores of tale collections from Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, Oceania, North and South America were published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[65] Many of these drew on sources published previously, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, or even in the nineteenth century, and many are consequently neither oral nor from the unlettered folk. Moreover, many of the texts published in the nineteenth century should be carefully compared with their precursors and predecessors to determine the extent to which their content and their style represent nineteenth-century efforts to 'Grimmify' the material, that is, to make tales conform to the norms established by the Grimms in their collection, for 'Grimmification' remained a powerful editorial force until well into the twentieth century.

CONCLUSION

The questions being asked of folk and fairy tales and the methodologies which underlie their answers have changed considerably in recent decades. Historico-geographical studies have largely been superceded by a compelling interest in other, more socio-culturally related areas of research.[66] In the obverse of the studies discussed in the beginning of this article, contemporary folk narrativists turn increasingly to social

[63] These form the subject of Wilma Sparing's study, *The Perception of Reality in the Volksmärchen of Schleswig-Holstein: A Study in Interpersonal Relationships and World View* (New York, 1984).

[64] See the listing in Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (Berkeley, 1946; rpt 1977), 398–9.

[65] See the listing of 'Principal collections of folktales' in Stith Thompson, *op. cit.*, 467–79.

[66] Papers of the quinquennial Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research. The most recent volume – Kvideland, Reimund and Torunn Selberg (eds) (Bergen, 1985).

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history to understand how fairy tales suit the cultural reality of the community in which they are told.[67]

Methodologically, reliance on a single tale in folk and fairy tale analysis has come to be seen as dangerously limiting, because it ignores the variability which is an integral part of the living tradition of storytelling. Comparing many tales which belong to a single tale type or which treat the same subject offers the possibility of multiple confirmation in several categories – distribution, structure, style and content.[68] The most recent summary of methods and sources appears in *Interpretation of Fairy Tales* by Bengt Holbek,[69] and the most important reference work in the field of folk narrative today is the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (Berlin, 1977–), which is rapidly becoming indispensable for research in the field of folk narrative. It embraces oral and written folk narrative material with reference to its social, historical and religious background and to the interplay between literature and oral narrative.[70] As of January 1989 five volumes (A – Gott) have been published.

Much remains to be done with the folk narrative materials so painstakingly assembled in the last century. The questions asked of this material by historians and by folk narrative scholars increasingly converge and overlap,[71] and the materials they address become increasingly similar,[72] so that the historian's rigorous assessment of folk and fairy tales as historical documents has the potential to augment the folk narrative scholar's keen awareness of the layers of information presented by folk and fairy tales.

State University of New York at Stony Brook

[67] Satu Apo, 'Questions arising in the comparative study of magic tales', *Journal of Folklore Research*, XXIII (1986), 177–86.

[68] See my discussion of multiple confirmation as a necessary corrective to decades of outrageous assertions about the 'meaning' of *Grimms' Tales* in *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys*, xi; also Apo, *op. cit.*, 1986, esp. 183.

[69] Folklore Fellows Communications, 239 (1987).

[70] Hans-Jörg Uther, 'The encyclopedia of the folktale' in *Fairy Tales and Society*, *op. cit.*, 187–93.

[71] The theme for the 1989 Congress of the International Society for Folk-Narrative Research (Budapest, 10–17 June 1989) was *Folk Narrative and Cultural Identity*.

[72] The staff of the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (Universität Göttingen, Volkskundliches Seminar) is in the process of establishing an archive of illustration material.

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